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An LGBTQ flag is seen in an illustration photo. (OSV News/zReuters/Nadja Wohlleben)

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by Catherine M. Odell

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According to Kate Berry, the co-founder of Catholic Allies, there had never really been a grand plan to start an organization to promote love and respect for the LGBTQ+ community among Catholics in Indianapolis.

"The other Catholic Allies co-founder, Danielle Noel Wiese and I were good friends," said Berry. "We were in a book club together with a bunch of our high school girlfriends. We had all attended Catholic schools and had loved it. But as we all became parents, we discussed how we wanted to raise our children as loving and respectful. We wanted them to show love and compassion towards everyone — including members of the LGBTQ+ community. We felt that we needed to show our kids at home how to do that."

As a result, the nonprofit [Catholic Allies](#) was officially created in 2023 by Berry, a physician assistant and Danielle Wiese, a pediatrician. Some of their high school friends joined in to publicize the new group in their own parishes. After doing a little research, Berry found that Catholic Allies was more or less unique. She found that an Oklahoma group and several others around the country had also emerged to do what Catholic Allies wanted to do — prayerfully promote a Catholic culture of love

and support for LGBTQ+ people.



Kate Berry is co-founder of Catholic Allies in Indianapolis. (Courtesy of Catholic Allies)

So in 2023, Catholic Allies began to reach out to northside Indianapolis parishes. Particularly, the group wanted to connect with parents of school-aged children. But the group also wanted to collaborate with Catholic teachers, principals, pastors and with Archbishop Charles Thompson of Indianapolis. Their goal? To help provide real opportunities for Catholics of all ages to gather and learn to be more loving and accepting of LGBTQ+ friends, family members or neighbors.

Three to four Catholic Allies events were scheduled each year in its first several years. Events and publicity were well planned. The group's mailing list rapidly grew to 500, though its word-of-mouth outreach apparently went much further. Often, however, Catholic Allies had to repeat what its goal was and what it wasn't.

"Changing church doctrine about homosexuality or challenging others' personal beliefs is not our mission," said Denise McGonigal, who serves as a director of communications for Catholic Allies. "It's to form within our community — and especially within our youth — attitudes of respect, compassion and sensitivity for LGBTQ+ persons."

McGonigal's own commitment to Catholic Allies' mission took root after her grandson, a middle school student at a Catholic elementary school, told her about an article he'd read about the former NBA player Jason Collins, the first openly gay male playing a professional sport. Her grandson told her that he couldn't talk to anyone at school about Collins or about anyone being gay because being gay "is bad."



Danielle Wiese is co-founder of Catholic Allies in Indianapolis. (Courtesy of Catholic Allies)

"I didn't always think about LGBTQ+ people the way I do today," McGonigal said. "Then, I began to listen more deeply," just as she had patiently listened to her grandson who'd learned about a professional basketball player who was courageously willing to tell the world that he was gay.

McGonigal said that Catholic teaching truly supports Catholic Allies' goal. At [World Youth Day](#) in 2023, Pope Francis told the world, "In the church, there is room for everyone! Everyone ... no one is left out or left over. There is room for everyone, just the way we are." And she sometimes refers people to paragraph 2358 in the [Catechism of the Catholic Church](#): "They (homosexual individuals) must be accepted with respect, compassion, and sensitivity. Every sign of unjust discrimination in their regard should be avoided."

She's also quick to refer to a 2021 [statement supporting at-risk LGBTQ youth](#) signed by about 10 bishops. The statement appeared on the website of the Tyler Clementi Foundation, which honors Clementi, who died by suicide in 2010 after being bullied and harassed.

"As Catholic Bishops in the United States," the bishops said, "we join with the Tyler Clementi Foundation in standing up for LGBT youth in our country. As we see in the Gospels, Jesus Christ taught love, mercy and welcome for all people, especially for those who felt persecuted or marginalized in any way ... "

The statement said LGBT youth are at risk of violence, homelessness and suicide.

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Catholic Allies' most recent event was titled "Promoting Love, Respect, Sensitivity & Compassion for Our LGBTQ+ Family, Friends, Community." The Feb. 25 evening event featured prayer, a guided meditation led by a retired priest and small group table discussions where participants were invited to share and then listen uncritically to others.

Thompson did not respond to an invitation to the event nor to any correspondence from Catholic Allies, the group said.

Having teachers join Catholic Allies, which now includes parents, grandparents, and college students, is one of the group's goals. "We would love to have a meeting for teachers, and we could bring experts in to talk about why this topic is so important," Berry said.

Listening and finding common ground, according to Denise McGonigal, is what Catholic Allies offered Feb. 25 and will continue to offer. It was about building bridges and not walls, she said, and was organized in the spirit of the synod introduced by Pope Francis in 2023-2024.

"Pope Francis said that it's only when we come together and sit together can we have respectful dialogue and only when we really listen — not with the intention of responding but with the intention of seeing the other person's point of view — will we ever be able to move toward unity and harmony."